



Project
MUSE[®]

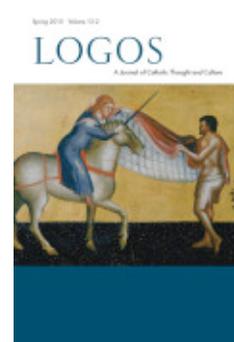
Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

Character, Choice, and Harry Potter

Deavel, Catherine Jack.
Deavel, David Paul.

Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture, Volume 5,
Number 4, Fall 2002, pp. 49-64 (Article)

Published by University of St. Thomas
DOI: [10.1353/log.2002.0048](https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2002.0048)



 For additional information about this article
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/log/summary/v005/5.4deavel.html>

CATHERINE JACK DEAVEL
DAVID PAUL DEAVEL

Character, Choice, and Harry Potter

ALMOST AS OVERWHELMING AS THE HYPE surrounding the Harry Potter books (and now movies and DVDs) has been the heat generated in some Christian circles, evangelical, fundamentalist, and sometimes Catholic. Despite the impressive amount of attention given the books, however, the discussion tends to focus only on a few select themes. Critics of the book generally claim that the series is leading children to explore the occult by glamorizing witchcraft. Some critics will also mention a disdain for rules on the part of Harry and his friends, but such a train of thought is rarely substantial.¹ Rather, how one portrays magic or the occult has lapped up much of the ink. That Harry Potter might lead a child to the occult is possible, but we find it highly improbable, for the simple reason that the only kind of magic in the book that has real-life occult parallels is fortune-telling, which is pretty much dismissed (more on this later). Some of the more sophisticated Christian critics dissect the portrayal of magic and the notion of subcreation in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, then compare J. K. Rowling to them. While such a discussion can be useful and informative, those who pursue this line of conver-

sation often seem to be bringing up Harry Potter only to talk about Narnia and Middle Earth. Such a piece is Steven Greydanus's otherwise interesting essay "Harry Potter vs. Gandalf."² While making many noteworthy observations about the portrayal of magic in children's literature, and ultimately defending Rowling from her reputation as "corrupter of youth," Greydanus nevertheless gives the impression that he hasn't really read the books except to analyze her use of magic. Indeed, such critics seem to us to have missed the point about the books. Just as M. Night Shyamalan's movie *The Sixth Sense* was not really about ghosts, but instead about parenting, Harry Potter is not really about magic, but about character.

Character is an appropriate word since in Greek it originally denoted an instrument for marking or the external mark itself, like a brand. Harry's lightning-shaped scar is such a literal character, the sign not only of the dark forces which have tried to kill him since birth, but of his survival and the reason for that survival. That reason is the love of his parents, in particular his mother, which has protected him, shaped him, and continues to shape him. Character is, more important, the mark that is left on the world by a person's chosen actions or, if you prefer, his way of being in the world. It is the stuff of the moral judgment of a person. This essay will explore what kind of character Rowling holds up as a model for civilization by showing her emphasis on choice versus destiny, how choices must be made according to the criteria of truth and absolute moral limits, and the deeper magic of love, which is sacrificial and forgiving and which is taught most often in the context of the family. We find the kind of character Rowling portrays as good to be strongly consonant with what Paul VI called a "civilization of love" and what John Paul II has called a culture of life.

How Harry is to grow up and what he is to become is a central point of drama in the stories. There are numerous pressures coming from, respectively, Harry's Muggle (or nonmagical) relatives,

the elements of magical society that believe in fortune-telling, the elements that espouse a purity of blood cult, and Harry himself that all seem to advocate a rather fatalistic view of the human person.

Harry's Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon themselves represent the fatalistic view of life very well. Their entire mistreatment of Harry is based upon their dislike (and Aunt Petunia's evident jealousy of) Harry's mother and father, who, Uncle Vernon opines, were "weirdos, and the world's better off without them in my opinion."³ Their assessment of Harry's parents, wrong though it is, is not nearly as bad as their treatment of Harry from before the time he can be accountable for his actions—simply because he is his parents' child. Aunt Marge, another loathsome relative of Harry's, puts it most succinctly when she says, "If there's something wrong on the *inside*, there's nothing anyone can do about it."⁴ If one is born into a given destiny, one cannot hope to act otherwise.

Part of the perennial dramatic tension of the books is that Harry internalizes the fear that Aunt Marge might be right, even when in the magical world where his powers are accepted. Although it is clear to the reader that Harry is our hero, it is not always clear to Harry. He worries from the very first that it might be his destiny to be among the house of Slytherin (Voldemort's old house), about whom the Sorting Hat says, "*Those cunning folk use any means / To achieve their ends*"⁵—and then offers that Harry might be successful there. The other books continue this theme, fueling Harry's anxiety at every turn and making him wonder again and again if there is not some truth to his fear. The second book hinges on Harry's own external similarities to the young Lord Voldemort—especially his gift of speaking parseltongue, the language of snakes—and the suspicion that Harry himself is responsible for unleashing the horrors of the Chamber of Secrets.

This notion of fate is amplified by the voices in the magical world who swear by the stars and the seers of the spirit world. One of the

droller lines in the entire series is when Rowling notes that divination professor Sybil Trelawney “kept predicting Harry’s death, which he found extremely annoying.”⁶ Indeed, Sybil makes a number of predictions which annoy Harry, Ron, and Hermione to no end, but which seem powerful to some of the other students. It is not clear whether the same people who hold to the stars also hold to the “racial” theories that obsess other denizens of Rowling’s world, but we see that they are a part of the landscape. Much of the series is building up to a war on the Muggle population and those who are not full-blooded magical families. The voices of Draco Malfoy and his Slytherin friends urge loudest their belief that birth is what’s most important. The voice of Aunt Marge is the same as the Malfoys’ is the same as Sibyl Trelawney’s. Destiny is destiny.

Of course, the answer to this problem is given both dramatically and philosophically. Racial claims are not so much answered as annihilated by the fact that Harry and Voldemort are both “half-bloods,” and Hermione, perhaps technically the best student wizard, has no magical lineage in her family. The perspective we are to admire is expressed when Dumbledore warns the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, about this obsession with blood, “You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!”⁷ As for reading “fate,” Sibyl Trelawney’s predictions are almost universally wrong, or too vague to mean anything. Dumbledore offers that in Trelawney’s tenure she has only made two true predictions. He then explains to Harry that the difficulty with telling the future lies in the complicated and diverse consequences of any of our actions.⁸

This analysis of the prediction of future events highlights the message that Harry Potter and his readers are to receive, namely, that character is not something that is inscribed in us irrevocably by the stars, by our birth, or even by the actions that others take. Steven Greydanus seems to have misunderstood the books when he claims (falsely by the way) that Harry is never punished by good authority

figures “because he is a boy of destiny, or something like that.”⁹ Harry is not a “boy of destiny” for Dumbledore or any of the “good authorities.” True, Remus Lupin, a “good authority,” covers for Harry after he dangerously sneaks out for a good time in the nearby magical village, but Lupin’s reprimand is tougher than punishment. Lupin reminds Harry of his parents’ sacrifice, saying, “A poor way to repay them—gambling their sacrifice for a bag of tricks.”¹⁰ No, the truth is that Harry’s destiny depends on him.

The point is made most strongly in the second book: our freedom to make our choice is always in front of us. We learn there the striking similarities between Harry Potter and Voldemort. Both are half-Muggles who were mistreated by Muggles. They both have similar gifts of resourcefulness, determination, the gift of parseltongue, and even a certain disregard for rules; yet Dumbledore is adamant that what makes Harry different, and what made the Sorting Hat refrain from putting him in Slytherin, is his own choice. “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”¹¹ If used properly, libertarian freedom manifests itself in good choices, and good choices lead to more freedom. It is in freedom that human dignity and human identity are found.

In the modern West, choice itself is often conceived of as the highest goal. Libertarian freedom itself takes center stage as the Good. What we choose has value precisely because we choose it. Some critics claim that the Harry Potter books illustrate just such a view of morality. Catholic novelist Michael O’Brien states that the series is utterly devoid of “any reference to a system of moral absolutes against which actions can be measured.”¹² Instead, O’Brien argues, Harry and his friends are taught

to submit themselves to no higher law than the wizard authorities who will help them exercise their powers “wisely.” However, the authorities themselves are divided, imparting to the

impressionable reader the certainty that the best person to decide what is or is not a “proper use of magic” is the young witch or magician himself, guided only by the occasional intervention of a Dumbledore or some similar guru figure.¹³

Yet from what we have seen, O’Brien’s dismissal is far too hasty. In fact, the guidance of Dumbledore and other authorities does not appear to be based on their own aesthetic preferences. Simply to note that Dumbledore is an authority is to miss the heart of this character. Dumbledore’s authority does not derive primarily from his power or position. While he is a formidable wizard and headmaster of Hogwarts, Dumbledore commands Harry’s respect and loyalty because he is virtuous. He is virtuous precisely because he acts according to a “higher law” of moral standards. Further, the plot twists and Harry’s routinely mistaken theories about which characters are to be trusted and which are to be regarded with suspicion leave little doubt that young wizards are a fallible lot. The perfect example of this misjudgment is the rather unappealing potions professor, Snape, who is nevertheless trusted by Dumbledore, and thus to be trusted by us. Yet throughout the first four books, Harry and his friends always consider him the prime suspect of whatever evil is being perpetrated.

Moreover, the Harry Potter books consistently present a world in which the moral worth of a choice depends upon the moral worth of what is chosen. Choice itself is not what Dumbledore promotes, but rather the choice of the good. Of course, what the good is is the question. One central indication of a commitment to objective moral criteria is the emphasis on truth, a truth which unflinchingly serves as a litmus test for characters’ actions and judgments. The Potter stories make clear that the first criterion for making the right choice in any situation is that it conform to Truth, with a capital “T.” There is no postmodern subjectivizing but instead a confidence that the Truth is out there and that it is knowable. This theme sounds an echo (though unintended) of John Paul II’s claim that what is criti-

cal for forming consciences is “the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth.”¹⁴ And just as in real life, so in Rowling’s world those on the side of the good are “all those that we can persuade of the truth.”¹⁵ The fourth book leaves Cornelius Fudge, the archetypal weak administrator, denying the return of Voldemort in the face of evidence, “a short angry wizard, refusing, point-blank, to accept the prospect of disruption in his comfortable and ordered world. . . .”¹⁶

Harry himself is learning the value of truth all through the books, from Dumbledore’s teaching and also through actively looking for the truth that will bring true freedom. As for Dumbledore, he himself always gives every indication that the truth is both powerful and, if you will, sacred—“a beautiful and terrible thing.”¹⁷ He insists from the very beginning on naming things properly. While most wizards continue to refer to “He who must not be named” or “You-Know-Who,” Dumbledore calmly refers to Voldemort, noting that “it all gets so confusing if we keep saying ‘You-Know-Who.’”¹⁸ He tells Harry later: “Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.”¹⁹ The second reason for properly naming the dark lord seems the most straightforward—avoiding fear—but the first reason, though seemingly mundane, contains the deeper truth. Avoiding confusion in a world in which dark forces manipulate the light is essential for those who are seeking to make the right choices. And Voldemort, whose name means “will-for-death,” sows confusion right and left. “Decent people are so easy to manipulate, Potter,” says one of Voldemort’s followers in the fourth book.²⁰ And thus Dumbledore’s principle extends beyond just naming things properly. Avoidance of confusion means, just as it does for Augustine and Kant, never lying. As he tells Harry: “. . . I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I beg you’ll forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie.”²¹

In contrast, Voldemort blithely denies the objective truth of morality and advocates the false freedom of unfettered choice. In the

first book, Voldemort convinces Quirrell, his henchman and eerie host, that “[t]here is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it.”²² True to this false premise, Voldemort unflinchingly uses other lives to further his return to power. Thus, he reveals himself, especially in the first book, as a parasite. This echoes the traditional Christian notion of evil. Evil is privation, a lack of something that should be present. It is parasitic upon being, just as a lie is parasitic upon truth. Too weak to sustain himself, Voldemort is literally parasitic. In order to survive, he must find a host willing to sustain him in his shadowy and tentative existence. Quirrell is irreparably harmed by the dark lord’s presence and ultimately sacrificed to Voldemort’s advantage. As Dumbledore explains to Harry, the dark lord “shows just as little mercy to his followers as to his enemies.”²³

Further, the Dark Arts in themselves, and not just their use by Voldemort or “bad people,” are not treated as neutral technology in the Harry Potter series. In fact, as Alan Jacobs has written, we could see the use of magic in these books as merely a more dramatic presentation of the real world problem of technology.²⁴ All magic, whether potions, flying broomsticks, or magical creatures, has its dangers. A working assumption of the books is that a school of wizarding such as Hogwarts is necessary to train young wizards because magic is neither easy nor safe. The Dark Arts class stands out among the courses, however, and serves as another indication that a system of absolutes is at work. At Hogwarts, the Dark Arts class is purely a defensive endeavor. Teachers and students are forbidden to practice spells that destroy human life. Moreover, Hogwarts is unable to keep a Dark Arts teacher for more than an academic year, a detail that reveals the toll that the Dark Arts take upon their practitioners and even those who study to defend against them. In fact, in none of the four books is the professor of Dark Arts quite what he seems, a point which seems to underscore on a literary level that the Dark Arts can be deceptive and dangerous. Again, the wise Dumbledore

is the model on this score, a wizard who might know about the Dark Arts but steadfastly refuses to use them at any point. When Dumbledore opines that Voldemort had powers that went beyond his own, Professor McGonagall retorts, “Only because you’re too . . . noble to use them.”²⁵ By contrast, the characters whom we know to have been aligned with Voldemort (and are again so-aligned by the fourth book) are the ones who possess dangerous items, such as the diary of the teenage Voldemort that entraps poor Ginny Weasley in the second book. It was the loathsome Malfoy family who had that particular piece of technology. Their attitude is summarized by young Draco Malfoy, who says that Hogwarts should take a more “sensible” line on teaching dark arts: students should be instructed in the practice of the Dark Arts rather than confined to “just the defense rubbish.”²⁶ The position we are meant to take is different, however. Truth is important and truth involves limitations on action for those who are seeking the good.

Harry follows an immediately recognizable tradition in the protagonists of children’s literature. The first thing that we know about Harry Potter—before he arrives at Hogwarts, before his hair-raising adventures, before he flies about in Quidditch matches—is that he is a tragically orphaned little boy. In many children’s stories, the protagonist’s lack of parents adds an extra air of romance, highlights the achievements of a self-made hero, or simply avoids the inconvenience of explaining how our hero escapes the watchful eye of parents to embark on fantastic adventures. While some of these literary aims may be at work in the Harry Potter series, the importance of Harry’s missing parents and, additionally, the role of the Weasley family are more than just plot devices. For they are Harry’s family—and families most shape the character of children. They teach the deepest lessons. So it is that the examples and sacrifices of the Potters and of the Weasleys prepare the children, especially Harry, to make virtuous choices themselves.

Brought up by the Dursleys, Harry is told that his parents died in a car accident. Only when he enters the wizarding world does he learn the truth: both his father and mother died at the hands of Voldemort as they tried to protect Harry. His parents' sacrifice of love marks Harry more deeply and formatively than his magical talents or even than the lightning bolt scar on his forehead. The hate in Voldemort's attack on Harry leaves the disfigurement of Harry's scar. In contrast, the loving sacrifice of Harry's mother not only shields Harry from Voldemort's curse, throwing it back on the evil wizard, but her sacrifice also marks Harry invisibly and more fundamentally. After Harry escapes a frightening encounter with Voldemort at Hogwarts, Dumbledore explains:

Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing that Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign . . . to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.²⁷

Notice that Voldemort is not beaten back by Lily Potter's magical power, nor does Harry ever escape the dark lord in any of the four published books because he is a better wizard. Instead, Harry is primarily protected by the love of his parents and by the help of his friends. James and Lily Potter's sacrifices demonstrate the truth that love is stronger than death. The Potters sacrifice their lives for love of their infant son while Voldemort is reduced to a ghastly living death. An act of hate will always harm the agent while an act of love preserves life.

Further, Harry is not only protected by his parents' sacrifice but also inspired to follow their example in his own actions. We will focus on Harry's imitation of his father. In the third book, when

friends of his parents close in on Peter Pettigrew, the wizard who betrayed the Potters to Voldemort, Harry intervenes. Harry throws himself between his parents' betrayer and their would-be avengers. He refuses to let his parents' friends kill Pettigrew, telling him, "I'm doing it because—I don't reckon my dad would've wanted them to become killers—just for you."²⁸ While Harry has not forgiven his parents' betrayer at this point, he still has the model of his father as a guide to his own actions, and Harry chooses to follow his father's example rather than to indulge his own desire for revenge. It seems no coincidence that later in this same book Harry mistakes an image of himself for a ghostly image of his father. Further, when Harry calls forth a "Patronus" to protect himself and his friends from danger, this magical defender comes as a stag, an animal associated with his father. In fighting to save his friends and in sparing his parents' betrayer, Harry chooses to act with the courage and virtue that characterized his father. Dumbledore assures Harry, "I knew your father very well . . . He would have saved Pettigrew too, I am sure of it."²⁹ Harry is growing to resemble his father not only in his physical appearance but in his character as well.

Against the high drama of Harry's own family, the boisterous, red-headed Weasley clan might appear at first glance to provide a quaint supporting cast or even comic relief—the large Irish family with as many quirks as kids, all larger than life.³⁰ Ron Weasley, Harry's best friend, has five older brothers—including the incorrigible twins, Fred and George—and one younger sister. Mr. Arthur Weasley works in the Ministry of Magic and is fascinated with Muggle technology. Mrs. Molly Weasley spends most of her time trying to keep her unruly brood in order. The Weasleys are also a poor family. Ron's ungainly hand-me-downs inspire merciless mocking at school, and he is embarrassed by his own lack of means in contrast to Harry's sizable, newly acquired inheritance.

The Weasleys are much more than window dressing. However much they resemble the stereotypical large, poor Irish-Catholic fam-

ily of our world, they mirror even more the traditional, strong but flexible fiber of that sort of family, combining a clannish closeness with an eye toward the alien and stranger. In fact, next to Harry's parents, the Weasleys provide the most powerful illustration of how parents form the character of their children through example and sacrifice. They are the primary model of a functioning family in the series. Early in the series, the Weasleys' main role as a family is to provide a sanctuary for Harry. The Weasleys effectively adopt Harry. From the beginning, they treat him with kindness. The first Christmas at Hogwarts, Mrs. Weasley sends Harry homemade fudge and his own "Weasley sweater," one of the dreaded garments that she knits annually for each of her own children.³¹ When Harry stays with the Weasleys, "what he found most unusual . . . wasn't the talking mirror or the clanking ghoul: It was the fact that everybody there seemed to like him."³² Again, magic is not half so powerful as human virtue.

As the series progresses, we learn more about the Weasleys and see them in action. In the fourth book, Harry accompanies the Weasleys to the Quidditch World Cup. When a group of wizards terrorizes a local Muggle family and sends the Quidditch fans into panic, Mr. Weasley immediately orders his younger children and their friends to find safety in the woods while he goes to help confront the renegade wizards. Meanwhile, the three oldest Weasleys are already sprinting to join the fight. This last point is delivered as an aside, as though the Weasley boys' actions are a matter of course. To their parents' credit, this seems to be exactly the case. Mr. Weasley gives no orders to his elder sons. They do not need such an order. Like their father, they do not hesitate to put themselves in danger in order to help the Muggle family.

At the end of the fourth book, when Cornelius Fudge has closed his eyes to the unpleasant truth that Voldemort is again a threat, the first person whose help Dumbledore enlists is Mrs. Weasley. Although she is not the most powerful wizard in the room, Dumb-

ledore trusts her completely: again, strength of character is valued more highly than magical skill. Mrs. Weasley assures him that he can count on her and her husband. We also learn that Mr. Weasley's low-ranking position at the Ministry of Magic is due to his principled defense of Muggles. This same stance is what leads Dumbledore to rely on the Weasleys. He entrusts Mr. Weasley with the task of rallying "all those that we can persuade of the truth" within the Ministry.³³ Notice that the Weasleys have chosen to sacrifice their status within the wizard world and the economic interests of their family rather than to compromise moral principles. They will not tacitly condone the myth that wizards are superior to Muggles.³⁴ Mr. and Mrs. Weasley's choices and character earn them the respect of Dumbledore and, more tellingly, the respect and emulation of their own children, Harry included. Could not the Weasleys be well-described by John Paul's tribute to parents in *Evangelium Vitae*? "By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift."³⁵

In saying that the series promotes a "culture of life," we are not saying that there is nothing in the series that could be harmful for children. The books are not flawless either literarily or morally. No books are flawless literarily. Tolkien thought Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles* a bit amateurish. And morally speaking, even Homer nods. If it is impious to say the Bible nods, one can at least note that it depicts certain immoral actions of the Patriarchs without explicit immediate censure, a fact that has driven allegorical readings of Scripture from the time of Origen on. To judge J. K. Rowling by the same standards as Homer or the biblical writers seems a tad unfair. To judge her by a standard still higher is ridiculous.

What needs to be constantly acknowledged by critical readers is that all books, Scripture excepted, are a mixed bag. Any judgment of a book, or a series of books, needs to consider it as a whole. What is it promoting? What is it advancing? The Harry Potter books advance many Christian moral principles, even if these principles are not named as Christian. “He who is not against me is for me,” says the Judge of all history and literature. The adventures of Harry and his friends spark the moral imagination of young readers. The drama of the series centers around Harry’s decisions in the face of danger, temptation, and doubt of his own abilities and future. Harry triumphs because he ultimately chooses what is morally good. Christianity holds that there is only one truth, and this truth roots morality. To the extent that the Harry Potter books promote true moral principles and bring them to life for children, these books further Christian teaching and a culture of life. The Potter books do in fact promote such principles—and to no small extent.

Notes

This paper was originally presented at the conference *A Culture of Life* hosted by the Notre Dame Center for Ethics, 30 November 2001. We have benefited from the reading and suggestions of Gary Atkinson, Kenneth W. Kemp, and Steve Long of the University of St. Thomas.

1. Richard Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace Behind the Magick* (Camp Hill, Penn.: Horizon Books, 2001), 23 ff., is particularly egregious in his attempts to show that Rowling is “glamorizing” witchcraft, reading dark omens into her disavowals of personal belief in magic. He also argues tendentiously that Rowling is promoting a subjectivist ethics (38) in which lying is promoted as a good way of achieving ends. More on lying below.
2. Steven Greydanus, “Harry Potter vs. Gandalf,” at www.decentfilms.com. Abanes’s book, though dwelling on some ethical concerns as noted, is mostly preoccupied with unraveling Rowling’s allusions to real-world witchery.
3. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (New York, N.Y.: Scholastic, 1997), 66.
4. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (New York, N.Y.: Scholastic, 1999), 25.
5. *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 118.
6. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York, N.Y.: Scholastic, 2000), 193.

7. *Ibid.*, 708.
8. *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 426.
9. See n. 2.
10. *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 240. Connie Neal, *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBook Press, 2001), has a fine chapter called "Using Harry Potter to Help Kids Grow in Goodness" that is based on her premise (190) that Harry's own moral growth is depicted in a realistic form. In a later chapter she writes what might be considered an Evangelical Protestant analogue of this paper, noting various biblical truths that seem to come up in the course of the series.
11. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1998), 333.
12. Michael O'Brien, "Harry Potter and the Paganization of Children's Literature," *Catholic World Report*, April 2001, available at <http://catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Igpress/2001-04/essay.html>. Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible* (38), makes a similar argument, ultimately concluding that the ethics of the series can be summed up as: (1) rules are made to be broken if they do not serve one's self-interest, (2) rules need not be obeyed if no good reason seems to exist for them, and (3) lying is an effective and morally sound means to achieve one's desired goals.
13. Michael O'Brien, "Harry Potter and the Paganization of Children's Literature." Again, Abanes (250) reads almost identically, writing that the rules of magic are "completely dependent upon subjective determinations by the characters."
14. *Evangelium Vitae*, 96.
15. *Goblet of Fire*, 711.
16. *Ibid.*, 707.
17. *Sorcerer's Stone*, 298.
18. *Ibid.*, 11.
19. *Ibid.*, 298.
20. *Goblet of Fire*, 676.
21. *Sorcerer's Stone*, 298.
22. *Ibid.*, 291.
23. *Ibid.*, 298.
24. Alan Jacobs, "Harry Potter's Magic," *First Things* 99 (Jan. 2000): 35-38.
25. *Sorcerer's Stone*, 11.
26. *Goblet of Fire*, 165.
27. *Sorcerer's Stone*, 299.
28. *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 376.
29. *Ibid.*, 427.
30. J. Bottum, "Success Story: Why *Harry Potter* is the Ultimate Children's Tale," *The Weekly Standard* (1 Nov. 1999): 29-30, at 29, notes Rowling's ability to master clichés: "A writer who puts one cliché into a book manages to produce pulp fiction. A writer who uses a dozen can produce a classic. And a writer who includes them all—well, only Homer has ever managed that. Something very interesting begins to happen in literature when the standard, hackneyed old tropes and figures

are jumbled up together and allowed to start pushing and shoving among themselves.”

31. *Sorcerer's Stone*, 201.
32. *Chamber of Secrets*, 42.
33. *Goblet of Fire*, 711.
34. Strangely enough, Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible* (249) claims that even Mr. Weasley shares in what can only be considered Rowling's own “anti-Muggle slant” because of comments that Mr. Weasley made regarding many Muggles' propensity for self-deception regarding the world of magic.
35. *Evangelium Vitae*, 92.